

Report

Uzbekistan: ID documents and passports



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SUMMARY

The report concerns rules and procedures for issuing passports and ID documents in Uzbekistan, as well as other significant conditions for evaluating document notoriety.

Uzbekistan has mostly continued the Soviet Union's systems for registering personal information, as well as systems for residency registration (*propiska*) and exit visas, which are widely criticised for restricting citizens' freedom of movement and civil/political/economic rights. Regulations connected to citizenship, passport issuance and migration are complex, and are subject to corruption and political manipulation.

Births, marriages/divorces and deaths are registered by local population registration offices (*ZAGS*), while passports are issued by the "Department of visas and registration", commonly referred to as *OVIR* or *OVViOG*. A so-called *Mahalla* committee collects information on births, marriages/divorces and deaths in the *mahalla* and issue certificates and letters of reference to the inhabitants.

Uzbekistan issues machine-readable passports which meet the international requirements for security. Biometric passports were introduced in 2011. By the end of 2012, all Uzbek citizens will have switched to biometric passports.

Corruption in the passport system is widespread, but there is an absence of reliable information on topics related to document security and the degree to which false passports are a problem.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report concerns rules and procedures for issuing passports and ID documents in Uzbekistan. An account of the general documentation situation and rules for citizenship is made in the introduction. The administrative structure and central government agencies involved in document issuance are then outlined before various ID documents are described. This report deals with documents issued by the Uzbek government, even if some of the country's citizens will have different identity documents issued by Soviet authorities from the time before the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

This report is primarily based on information from open, English-language sources. Reference is made throughout to current regulations which are either referenced by sources or are available in English translation, but a complete overview of the regulations is not provided. The report does not seek to provide an exhaustive account of how regulations should be interpreted or what is practical, and it must be noted that, for various reasons, there will be deviations from the regulations and procedures described here. In particular, systematic corruption in the government apparatus indicates variations in practice. It is also known that regulations for passports, residency registration and entry/exit are used to frame political dissidents, human rights activists and journalists, amongst others.

Otherwise, there is little available information on the passport system. The lack of sources also means that there is inadequate basis for assessing the issue of document security in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan is characterised by a low degree of transparency and very few independent sources of information. Journalists and others who portray Uzbekistan in a way which does not harmonize with the government-sanctioned image of the country have been subject to criminal sanctions (Freedom House 2011). Information from the government is not reliable and it is likely that information which could portray the government in a negative way is withheld. Questions concerning the issuance of passports and ID documents are also politically sensitive, since they involve issues such as combating terrorism, organised crime, corruption and regional and international cooperation.

2. THE DOCUMENTATION SITUATION IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan declared itself an independent republic on 31 August 1991 when the Soviet Union was dissolved. The country has largely continued the Soviet Union's bureaucracy and is characterised as a documentation society with a tradition of registering and certifying a variety of conditions and situations. Uzbekistan has also retained the Soviet system of residency registration (*propiska*) and exit visas.

According to Uzbek law, all citizens of the country must have passports after the age of 16, and nothing suggests that there are Uzbek citizens or stateless people living in Uzbekistan who are missing documents.

Uzbeks need to validate their identity to travel within the country and on demand from the police in general. The police conduct regular identity checks in major cities, especially in Tashkent (representative of NGO, e-mail 21 December 2011). There are stationary checkpoints at the border between provinces and at the entrance to major cities (EWG 2010). Checks particularly occur in the border provinces of Surkhandarya, Ferghana, Sidaryo (Syrdarya) and Tashkent (EWG 2011). ID checks are less prevalent in rural areas, where there is less police present. However, some sources Landinfo had conversations with stated that in practice, not all Uzbeks carry their passports on a regular basis (Landinfo 2010).

Uzbeks need to present passports in a variety of other contexts. In meetings with citizens, the government generally requires that both passports and other written documentation be presented (Bogner 2003). The banking system has had similar documentation requirements. To pay with a credit/debit card or withdraw money from the bank, it was a requirement until July 2011 to document identity and present additional documentation from the bank (Uznews 2011a). PIN codes were not considered sufficiently secure.

3. CITIZENSHIP

3.1 CITIZENSHIP LEGISLATION

Everyone who had their permanent residency registered in Uzbekistan at the time the Law on Citizenship went into effect in 1992 became an Uzbek citizen (CERD 2006). Citizenship is otherwise granted by application and in the form of special presidential decree. According to article 17 in the Law on Citizenship, it is a requirement that the person has been living in Uzbekistan for at least five years, or was born in Uzbekistan and can document that one of their parents or grandparents were also born in Uzbekistan and that they have no other citizenship (CERD 2008). There is also a requirement that the person is legally working and does not have any other citizenship (Law on Citizenship 1992, article 17).

Children born abroad to parents who are both Uzbek citizens automatically get Uzbek citizenship (Farquharson 2011, p. 11). If the child is born abroad and only one of the parents is an Uzbek citizen, the child automatically gets Uzbek citizenship only if this parent was permanently residing in Uzbekistan at the time of the birth. Citizenship of children born abroad is otherwise granted on the basis of a joint declaration from the parents (Law on Citizenship 1992, article 14; CERD 2006).

Uzbekistan does not allow dual citizenship. Uzbeks living abroad could in theory meet the requirement of proving that they do not have dual citizenship upon entry, but this rarely happens in practice (U.S. Department of State 2010). It is unclear in which cases the Uzbek government might deny entry on this basis.

3.2 RENUNCIATION AND LOSS OF CITIZENSHIP

It is possible to cancel one's Uzbek citizenship through application. Decisions regarding the renunciation of Uzbek citizenship are granted in the form of a special presidential decree. The process is very long and costly. According to UNHCR (2009, p. 13), applicants have to pay a fee of USD 117, and the application process can take several years. According to UNHCR, many Uzbeks living in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan fail to apply for renunciation of their citizenship for financial reasons.

Uzbek citizens who join another state's military, security service, police, courts, etc. lose their Uzbek citizenship (Law on Citizenship 1992, article 21). Loss of citizenship can also occur for citizens who are living abroad and fail to report to the Uzbek consulate within five years without good reason. The consulate will notify the Uzbek Foreign Ministry of citizens who have not reported and make an assessment of whether the reason is justified (Farquharson 2011, p. 15). The Uzbek Foreign Ministry forwards the information from the consulate and issues a statement on the case to the president's citizenship commission, which makes the decision in the case. However, according to several sources Landinfo has consulted, the provision is not applied in practice (Landinfo 2009). At the same time, Landinfo is aware of conflicting reports on some cases in which Uzbeks who have not registered abroad have actually lost Uzbek citizenship (U.S. Department of State 2011). Amongst others, so-called "border brides", Uzbek women who are married and live in Kyrgyzstan, have had problems renewing their passports because they have failed to report to the Uzbek Embassy in Bishkek (UNHCR 2009; Eurasianet 2012). Therefore, practice seems to vary somewhat (see also Landinfo 2009).

3.3 STATELESSNESS

In 2010, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination / CERD) expressed concern for a significant number of stateless people in Uzbekistan (CERD 2010). The committee pointed out, amongst other things, that the procedures for obtaining citizenship are complicated, and that the requirements of first renouncing other citizenship can contribute to people who want Uzbek citizenship ending up stateless.

In general, the number of stateless people is unknown. The Uzbek government stated in 2008 that 86,703 stateless people were permanently living in Uzbekistan (CERD 2008), but has since denied that statelessness constitutes a problem (Farquharson 2011). In an article from the regime-critical news agency Uznews.net, the number of stateless people living in Uzbekistan with five-year residence permits was estimated at half a million (Uznews.net 2008).¹ Most stateless people in Uzbekistan are former citizens of the Soviet Union (Farquharson 2011).

¹ See point 6.5 on residence permits for stateless people.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

There are three levels of government in Uzbekistan: state, provincial and city/district. The districts also have underlying towns and cities which formally constitute a separate level of government, but which in practice constitute administrative units (Epstein & Winter 2004). Each neighbourhood is further administrated through so-called self-governing authorities (*mahalla*) (see section 4.1.3 on mahalla).

In addition to the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan and the capital city of Tashkent, Uzbekistan is divided into twelve provinces (*viloyatlar*)²: Andijan, Bukhara, Ferghana, Djizzakh, Khoresm, Namangan, Navoi, Kashkadariya, Samarkand, Sidaryo, Surkhondaryo and Tashkent.

The next level of government consists of districts (*tumanlar*)³ or cities (*shakharlar*).⁴ Altogether, there are 120 cities and 164 districts in Uzbekistan (Bektemirov & Rahimov 2001, p. 473).

4.1 GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Uzbek government structure is fine-meshed. In addition to a central state administration, there are local authorities at both a provincial level and at the underlying city/district level. The local government at each level is called *hokimiyat* and is led by a *hokim*, who is appointed by the president. For example, Tashkent is divided into 11 administrative districts (Epstein & Winter 2004, p. 36).

Cities underlying the district governments will have their own administration, even if they do not formally constitute their own level of government (The Urban Institute 2004). Underlying cities/districts and villages/towns are administrated through mahalla committees.

There are overlapping areas of responsibility between the central government, hokimiyats and mahallas (Bektemirov & Rahimov 2001, p. 489). In practice, both hokimiyats and mahallas are centrally governed. Therefore, the local administration hokimiyat may have functions which are normally subject to state agencies, especially in rural areas.

4.1.1 Population registration offices (ZAGS)

The local population registration offices (ZAGS) register personal information and issue ID documents. The Uzbek Department of Justice has the highest administrative and professional responsibility for the operation of ZAGS (The Governmental portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan n.d.). As a state agency, ZAGS is probably represented in each city/district (lowest level of government). In principle, there can also be several offices within the same city/district.

² Equivalent of *oblast* in Russian.

³ Equivalent of *rayon* in Russian.

⁴ See http://www.gov.uz/en/regional_authorities/ for a list of underlying cities/districts in each province.

4.1.2 Department of visas and registration

OVIR is a civilian police department which is responsible for the issuance of passports, and entry/exit visas and for residency registration. OVIR is a Russian acronym for Otdel Viz i Registratsii⁵ (Department of Visas and Registration) which is still used in most former Soviet republics. In Uzbek, the acronym OVViOG is used.

OVIR is subject to the Uzbek Department of the Interior, and is probably represented in each city/district (lowest level of government).

4.1.3 Mahalla, housing committee and building committee

The term *mahalla*⁶ is often used in the sense of *neighbourhood committee*, but was traditionally a strong social community based on family ties and Islamic traditions. Even if the mahalla's role in document issuance can vary, they generally have very important control and monitoring functions in Uzbek society.

Mahallas in Uzbekistan are regulated by the "Law on Community Self-government" (Mahalla Act) and have legal status as local self-governing authorities (Sievers 2002). In practice, mahallas are still part of the government apparatus directly subject to *hokimiyats*, and with a variety of official duties. There are about 12,000 mahallas registered in Uzbekistan, and each mahalla consists of 150 to 1,500 households (Urinboyev 2011, p. 39). With the Law on Community Self-government, a separate mahalla agency or foundation ("Mahalla Foundation") was also created which coordinates activities centrally.

Mahallas are administrative units based on neighbourhoods, but the general function and administration of mahallas varies (Sievers 2002, p. 100). The Board of Directors is called *kengash* and the Chair of the Board is alternately referred to as *rais* and *aksakal*⁷ in the Law on Community Self-government. *Aksakal* originally refers to the informal leadership of the traditional mahalla.⁸ Many mahallas retain a traditional leadership which operates in close cooperation with the formal government (Urinboyev 2011, p. 43; Sievers 2002, p. 119).

In addition to administering public benefits, arranging volunteer work and checking that residents have their residency registration, etc., mahallas issue certificates and confirmations for a variety of situations, which are then forwarded to the *hokimiyat* (Epstein & Winter 2004, p. 56).

The mahallas also register births, deaths, marriages, divorces and paternity. (Bektemirov & Rahimov 2001, p. 491) (see section 5.1 on birth certificates).

The leader of the mahalla (*rais*) may also have duties as a notary public; for example, certifying public documents (Bektemirov & Rahimov 2001, p. 491). Uzbekistan has had a system with both state and private notaries. However, the system of private

⁵ ОВИР (отдел визы и регистрации)

⁶ *Mahalla* is Arabic and means "neighbourhood".

⁷ *Aksakal* means "whitebeard", i.e. an older man.

⁸ The traditional leadership consists of an older man, a wealthy citizen (*boylar*) and a female leader (*dasturhonchi*).

notaries was abolished in 2010, and notarial transactions are now fully under state control (Ferghana ews 2010).

There is a distinction between mahallas and housing committees, so-called *Uy-joy mulkdorlari shirkati (shirkat)* or *TSJ* (Russian acronym) (Epstein & Winter 2004, p. 59). The housing committees are established to protect homeowners' common economic interests, but in practice, housing committees and mahallas often overlap each other in terms of territory, members, employees, duties and responsibilities (Epstein & Winter 2004, p. 59). Since housing committees are very large, the *domkom* scheme from Soviet times is continued. *Domkom* is a building committee, and generally consists of a person who is responsible for a block/apartment complex and who works closely with the mahalla. Domkoms have an overview of what goes on in their block, and report to the mahalla committee if someone is no longer living at their registered address, amongst other things (Tadjibaeva, meeting 7 February 2012).

5. KEY ID DOCUMENTS

5.1 BIRTH CERTIFICATES

An Uzbek birth certificate (*metrika*) is two pages and is issued on plain paper with a watermark and invisible/fluorescent printing (UV security) (DISCS).⁹ Birth certificates can also be issued bound in leather and in three languages (Uzbek, Russian and English). Name, location, date of birth, as well a date and place of issuance are specified on the certificate, in addition to the parents' names and ethnic origins. Birth certificates are numbered.

Births are registered by local ZAGS (U.S. Department of State n.d.).

Births are registered based on certificates from hospitals, as well as the parents' marriage certificate (ADB 2008, p. 25). Children born outside hospitals can and must also be registered. Landinfo has not found specific information on what documentation may be required in such cases. If the parents are not married, paternity is determined based on a joint declaration to ZAGS from the mother and father (ADB 2008, p. 23).

The mahalla will also register and certify births and paternity and forward information to local authorities (Bektemirov & Rahimov 2001, p. 491). It is somewhat unclear whether this is a step in the procedure for issuing birth certificates, or if the registration is related to the mahalla administering public benefits.

According to the Uzbek government, birth registrations for children under five years old are almost universal, because the registration provides the basis for economic benefits from the state (UNICEF 2002). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child/CRC) has otherwise recommended

⁹ The National Identity and Information Centre (NID) has prepared a clarification of concepts which is available at www.nidsenter.no.

that Uzbekistan abolish fees for issuing birth certificates, as well as take appropriate measures to ensure that children are registered immediately after birth (CRC 2006).

According to an article in Uznews.net (2012b), children who are born to unwed, under-age mothers are registered late to avoid unmarried couples being subject to investigation. In such cases, the birth clinic will only certify the birth after the mother is 18 years old.

5.2 MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE CERTIFICATES

A marriage certificate is two pages and is issued on plain paper with a watermark and invisible/fluorescent printing (UV security) (DISCS). It is signed and stamped by ZAGS.

Only registered marriages have rights under the law. Still, there are many Uzbek couples who have married through religious ceremony without registering the marriage. Polygamy is prohibited, and according to the law, girls cannot marry until they are 17 years old. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/CEDAW) has expressed concern that both polygamy and early marriage is still practised in Uzbekistan, especially in rural areas (CEDAW 2010).

According to Uzbek family law, both parties must consent to a divorce during pregnancy or if they have joint children under one year old (ADB 2008, p. 29). In practice, it is also a requirement that the parties go to mediation at the mahalla and that the mahalla committee issues a written confirmation that it has no objections to the divorce (Bogner 2003, p. 33; Refugee Review Tribunal 2010).

5.3 WORKBOOKS

A workbook provides an overview of both past and current employment (Uzinfoinvest n.d.). The workbook forms the basis for payment of benefits in case of illness or disability, and for calculating pension. Employees get workbooks from their employer (Uzinfoinvest n.d.). The system of workbooks comes from the Soviet Union.¹⁰

Interruptions in the workbook leads to loss of pension rights, and therefore it is important for many Uzbeks to have a workbook registered with an employer even if they are no longer receiving wages from there (Kandiyoti 1999). It is unclear the degree to which workbooks are still an important document, but updated information directed to foreign companies suggests that the document is still in use.¹¹

5.4 COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE BOOKS

Military service is mandatory in Uzbekistan. Compulsory military service applies from the age of 18. All Uzbek men must have a compulsory military service book, regardless of whether they have completed their military service or not (Landinfo 2009). The compulsory military service book is issued by the Uzbek Ministry of Defence (U.S. Department of State n.d.).

¹⁰ It is referred to as *trudovaja krishka* in Russian or *mihnat daftarchasi* in Uzbek (Kandiyoti 1999).

¹¹ See, for example, www.uzinfoinvest.com

5.5 DOCUMENTS FOR RESIDENCY PERMITS

Documents for residence permits are issued by OVIR to foreign citizens and to stateless people who have residence permits in Uzbekistan (Keesing Documentchecker). The document is considered a passport for these persons.

Residence permits are granted for five years and can be renewed. Foreigners who have reached 60 years of age get a residence permit with a duration equal to the expiration date on their home country's passport/travel document. Stateless people are granted permanent residence at age 60 (Regulations on Residence Permit 1999, chapter 4, section 17).

The documents for residence permits contain many of the same security elements as regular passports (watermark, lamination, perforated numbering), but are not machine-readable (Keesing Documentchecker), and are also not valid as a travel document. Documents for residence permits are only valid as an identification document in Uzbekistan.

Documents for residence permits for stateless people will be replaced with a biometric identity card (Open Central Asia 2011). The sources Landinfo has consulted do not give further information on such biometric ID cards.

6. PASSPORTS

Soviet authorities issued both domestic passports (valid domestic identification) and foreign passports (travel documents) and this system is still continued in some sense. However, many former Soviet republics have replaced the domestic passport with a national ID card.

Uzbekistan has not introduced ID cards, but issues national passports as valid domestic identification. The Uzbek government does not consider the passport an international travel document unless it contains a valid exit visa (see section 6.3.3.1 on exit visas). As far as Landinfo knows, countries outside the CIS do not operate on the same terms for considering an Uzbek passport a travel document.

Uzbekistan has started the process of switching to biometric passports and travel documents. The transition to biometric passports is scheduled to be complete by the end of 2015 (UzA 2011).

6.1 LEGISLATION

The regulations for passport issuance, residency registration, entry and exit are extensive. The regulations consist of decrees from the president, as well as instructions and directives issued by the government (Cabinet of Ministers), the Department of the Interior and local authorities (hokimiyat) (Uzbek German Forum 2010). The population is also faced with requirements laid down in secret decrees (Uznews.net 2012c).

Uzbekistan decided to switch to biometric passports in 2009. The transition to biometric passports is occurring gradually, and current regulations are valid until 31 December 2015 (Uzbekistan News Agency 2011). It is generally unclear what

changes in rules the introduction of biometric passports will involve (see section 6.3.3 on biometric passports).

The population in Uzbekistan generally has inadequate knowledge of applicable laws and rules (Tadjibaeva, meeting 7 February 2012; OECD 2011) and there also seems to be uncertainty on the regulations for passport issuance, residency registration and entry/exit. Questions related to the issuance and renewal of passports and exit visas for Uzbeks living abroad has been a popular topic on the Uzbek discussion forum *arbuz.com*.¹² Questions on procedures, conditions and consequences for violating the regulations on exit have been the subject of discussion (see, for example, Landinfo 2011 on exit provisions). It is a problem that the rules are being enforced arbitrarily, in addition to being subject to political manipulation and corruption (see chapter 7 on corruption).

6.2 PASSPORT REGISTRATION

The registration of biometric passports is centralised and formally subject to the government. The so-called "National Center for Personalization" registers biographical and biometric data and personalises passports, i.e. attaches an identity to a blank passport (Open Central Asia 2011). Landinfo has no information on what specific information is entered or who has access to the passport registry. It is unclear whether there is a centralised database of non-biometric passports.

6.3 NATIONAL PASSPORTS

Uzbekistan has issued national passports since 1 January 1995, in addition to separate travel documents for minors, diplomats and stateless people (Keesing Documentchecker; UzA 2009).

Passports are issued at OVIR in the city/district in which citizens have their residency registered.

Last name, first name, patronym, place of birth, gender, nationality/ethnicity and a personal identification number are listed in Uzbek, Russian and English.¹³ The passport also contains information on compulsory military service, marriage/divorce, children, residency registration, visa and blood type (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 7; U.S. Department of State n.d.).

Uzbek citizens have a legal obligation to carry passports from age 16 on. There is a fine or fee if a passport has not been applied for by this date (Uzbek source, e-mail 18 January 2012). A first-time passport is issued based on the presented birth certificate and parents' passports. The parents may obtain the passport on behalf of the child and the child does not necessarily need to appear in person (Uzbek source, e-mail 18 January 2012).

The passport is renewed at ages 25 and 45. This has changed with the introduction of biometric passports, which are given a validity of 10 years (see section 6.3.3). According to article 15 in Provisions on Passport Systems (1999), passports must also be exchanged if there is a change in last name, name, patronym or nationality.

¹² Arbuz was closed in 2011 after pressure from the government.

¹³ Landinfo has not found further information on how one is assigned a personal identification number or in what other contexts it may be used.

According to article 7 of the law, nationality is derived from the parents. If the parents are of different ethnicities, the passport holder chooses between the mother's or father's ethnicity the first time the passport is issued. They may later apply for a change of which ethnicity he/she is listed as, but this is only possible once.

Passports are also renewed if there is error, damage or loss, or if the pages of the visa or residency registration are used up. The information which is entered on the expired passport is transferred to the new passport, provided that the information is still valid (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 9).

Landinfo has not found further information on what supporting documentation must be submitted to obtain a passport, what procedures OVIR has for checking supporting documentation or whether it is required to appear in person to obtain non-biometric passports.

6.3.1 Non-machine-readable passports

Since Uzbek passports which are issued when the holder reaches 45 years old have unlimited validity, it is likely that the first passports which were issued after Uzbekistan became an independent republic are still in circulation. These passports are non-machine-readable, but are laminated with print, have perforated numbering, watermarks and invisible/fluorescent print (UV security) and use infra-red radiation as security elements.

6.3.2 Machine-readable passports

It is unclear when Uzbekistan introduced machine-readable passports which meet the requirements which the International Civil Aviation Organisation (International Civil Aviation Organisation/ICAO) places on security (ICAO 9303). Uzbek machine-readable passports generally have the same security elements as non-machine-readable passports. Non-biometric passports are valid until 31 December 2015 (UzA 2011).

6.3.3 Biometric passports

Biometric passports store fingerprints, photograph and biographical information electronically, and must be renewed every ten years.

OVIR is responsible for registering applications for biometric passports and for transmitting them to the "National Center for Personalization", where the passports are customised (UzA 2009).

The decision to switch to biometric passports was made in the presidential decree of 23 June 2009 (UzA 2009). Originally, the first passports were to be issued in 2010, primarily to persons who needed new passports at the time, i.e. Uzbeks who turned 16 years old, persons with expired passports, or persons who for other reasons needed to renew their passports (see section 6.3 on national passports). In addition, state employees and citizens who travel abroad or live abroad were to be prioritised for the issuance of biometric passports (UzA 2009).

The process was delayed for one year and the first biometric passports were issued in 2011. According to the plan, all citizens of Uzbekistan are to switch to biometric passports during the period of 2012-2015 (UzA 2011).

There is no information on what caused the introduction of biometric passports to be delayed by a year. So far it has not been a topic whether Uzbekistan has the necessary equipment and infrastructure to issue biometric passports at the speed predicted by the government.¹⁴

6.4 EXIT VISAS

Uzbek passports must have a separate exit visa to be valid as a travel document according to Uzbek law.

However, at various times it has not been a requirement that a passport have a valid exit visa to travel to several former Soviet republics. Labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan, for example, is not affected by the restrictions on travel. However, Uzbekistan has entered into agreements with Russia and Kazakhstan on enforcing the travel provisions so that Uzbek citizens cannot travel on to countries outside the CIS if they do not have a valid exit visa (Uzbek German Forum 2010).

Most people are allowed to exit the country (Landinfo 2011). The applicant must present the passport and a certificate from their employer. For unemployed Uzbeks, the mahalla fills out the form for obtaining an exit visa (Epstein & Winter 2004, p. 56). The exit visa is issued by OVIR for a fee and takes 15 days (Landinfo 2011). In practice, it can take longer (Uzbek German Forum 2010).

According to the Uzbek German Forum, applications for exit visas are in fact decided on by the security service (Uzbek German Forum 2010). Political dissidents, human rights activists, independent journalists, people who are connected to unregistered religious groups and others who are considered regime-critical or dissidents have been denied exit visas (Uzbek German Forum 2010). In general, travel will be denied to persons in the following cases:

- If the person has access to state secrets
- If the person has an ongoing criminal case, or is regarded as particularly dangerous/risk of recurrence by a court or parole board
- If the person has evaded legal obligations
- If the person has deliberately provided false information
- If the person is subject to civil lawsuit
- If the person is drafted into military service

An exit visa is valid for two years.

See Landinfo 2011 regarding the sanctions a violation of exit provisions can lead to.

Persons who have formally moved abroad can get an exit visa renewed at an embassy/consulate. The process to get a permission to travel abroad is extensive. According to the Uzbek German Forum (2010), it is required, amongst other things, to present the consent of immediate family members and accompanying children for ages 14-18 years, certificates from the military for compulsory military service for

¹⁴ However, see Uznews.net (2012a) on the onset of chaos and long queues to apply for biometric passports at OVIR. OSCE has also assisted with some equipment (OSCE 2012).

ages 17 to 27, workbook, birth certificate and any marriage certificate translated to Uzbek or Russian. As Landinfo understands it, the procedure to report moving abroad corresponds to the scheme for changing residency registration within the country. Applications to live abroad can be presented at an Uzbek consulate, which will forward the application to OVIR in the city/district where the person has his/her residency registered. The process can take up to 6 months and decisions are not explained (Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland n.d.).

6.5 TEMPORARY TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

A temporary travel document (certificate of return) is issued with validity of one month and only for return to Uzbekistan (Keesing Documentchecker). Such a temporary travel document is issued by an Uzbek embassy in case of loss of passport, damaged passport or expired passport (Consulate General of Uzbekistan in New York City n.d.).¹⁵ Upon arrival in Uzbekistan, this temporary passport must be delivered to the office of OVIR at their home location, which issues a new passport.

6.6 TRAVEL DOCUMENTS FOR STATELESS PEOPLE

Uzbekistan issues separate travel documents for stateless people. The travel document has the same security level as the document for residence permits and must be renewed at ages 25 and 45 (Keesing Documentchecker). The travel document is not machine-readable and does not meet the international standard established by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in terms of security. It has been invalid as an international travel document since 2010.

It is unclear to Landinfo whether biometric ID cards for stateless people (see section 5.5) will also be valid as travel documents, or if the scheme of a separate travel document will be continued.

6.7 STAMP FOR RESIDENCY REGISTRATION (PROPISKA) IN THE PASSPORT

Everyone residing in Uzbekistan has a legal obligation to have their residency registered at the address where they permanently or temporarily live. The residency registration is stamped in the passport. The residency registration scheme is partially regulated by “Provisions on Passport System in the Republic of Uzbekistan” from 26 February 1999, which is an attachment to a presidential decree from 1994 which deals with the issuance of passports (see section 6.1 on legislation).

Children's residency registration is shown on the documents of the parents or guardian (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 26). If a person moves to a new place, they must deregister (*vipiska*) at home before they can register their new address (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 32). Convicted persons are deregistered at the time a prison sentence is implemented, while dead people are deregistered after the death is registered (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 39 and 40).

Persons who live temporarily in another region for more than six months must have a

¹⁵ The Consulate General of New York refers to a "certificate of return", which, according to Keesing, is no longer valid. Temporary travel documents have been issued since 1 July 2007 (Keesing Documentchecker).

temporary residency registration.¹⁶ Also, persons who stay in another region for a period under six months must register, but such temporary registration will not be stamped into the passport (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 26). A person must register within three days of arrival.

Separate rules apply to residency registration in border areas.

OVIR performs registration for a fee and on the basis of the presented passport, military book and application (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 31). In rural areas, representatives of the local administration (self-governing bodies) perform the registration (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 30). It is somewhat unclear whether "self-governing bodies" refers to mahalla or hokimiyat. Hokimiyats are in principle elected by the population, while mahallas are formally autonomous agencies. (See chapter 5 on administrative structure).

The mahallas issue written confirmations of residence (Epstein & Winter 2004, p. 56). It is unclear to Landinfo what the conditions are to have one's residency registered and what type of documentation is required in addition to passport. The requirements for documentation probably vary based on individual circumstances and local provisions. After the terrorist attacks in Tashkent in February 1999, for example, a series of provisions were adopted which have made it very difficult to have one's residency registered there (Eurasianet 2011).

Residency registration controls access to social and economic rights, including access to health services, education, social security and property rights. Inadequate residency registration may lead to sanctions. Also, those who are responsible for enforcing passport law and employers who employ persons without residency registration can be held accountable (Provisions on Passport System 1999, article 42).

The police hold frequent passport checks and mahallas are required to report citizens without residency registration (Bogner 2003). However, in practice there are many who live and work without it. For example, the human rights organisation Uzbek German Forum (2010) estimates that there are more than one million labour migrants without residency registration in Tashkent. The residency registration system is criticised for limiting Uzbeks' freedom of movement and civil/economic rights and for contributing to extensive corruption in police and administration (see section 7 on corruption).

7. CORRUPTION

7.1 GENERAL INFORMATION ON CORRUPTION

Uzbekistan is perceived as one of the world's most corrupt countries and is ranked no. 177 of a total of 182 countries on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index for 2011 (TI 2011). Uzbekistan got a score of 1.6 of a scale from 0

¹⁶ Staying for longer than six months due to business trips, vacations, visiting a holiday home or medical treatment is exempt from the requirement on deregistration (ACCORD 2008)

to 10, where 0 is "highly corrupt" and 10 is "very clean".¹⁷

Corruption exists at all levels of government administration and in all aspects of governance. In a report from 2002 on police reforms in Central Asia, the International Crisis Group (2002, p. 22) characterises corruption in the Uzbek Department of the Interior as "rampant and systemic". The Department administers a wide variety of functions, including police, fire departments, prisons, border control and passport/visa issuance. The number of employees and budget are state secrets (International Crisis Group, p. 22). According to the International Crisis Group, positions in the police and the formal qualifications a position requires are, in practice, purchased. The potential for earnings through the position in addition to personal contacts is critical to how much one has to pay to get hired or promoted. The International Crisis Group (2002, p. 25) argues that personal connections through clan or family are an equally important factor as bribes, and that there is a close connection between simple and gross corruption, since public employees at lower levels ensure earnings higher in the system. It is Landinfo's perception that there is little evidence that the situation has changed significantly since 2002 in terms of the scope and character of corruption.

7.2 CORRUPTION IN THE PASSPORT SYSTEM

Many sources agree that the passport system creates many opportunities for simple corruption. For example, the Uzbek German Forum (2010) claims that it is both impossible to obtain an exit visa without paying bribes and that people without residency registration are systematically pressured for bribes by the police. There are also references to "*passportists*", employees in the local administration who act as intermediaries in meetings with corrupt authorities. The Uzbek German Forum (2010) refers to bribes in the order of USD 1,000 for the decree which grants renunciation of citizenship, and between USD 2,000 and 5,000 for residency registration in Tashkent. Furthermore an article from Uznews.net (2012c) argues that there is a financial motive behind new requirements for documentation to obtain exit visas.

The news source Eurasianet reports that corruption can make it possible to manage without residency registration altogether, and that migrants without residency registration can avoid sanctions by paying bribes to the police. The use of bribery also makes it possible to circumvent regulations so that children without residency registration get a place in school. Apartments are purchased by relatives or strawmen who have residency registration (Eurasianet 2011).

The extent of corruption alone indicates that false passports may be widespread. However, several sources agree that it is difficult to pay bribes to obtain citizenship (Uznews.net 2008) and false passports (here in the sense of a genuine document with false information). Regardless, there is little information which can give an indication of the extent of false passports in Uzbekistan. The media has reported very

¹⁷ TI's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) relies on results obtained from a selection of sources (...a combination of polls, drawing on corruption-related data collected by a variety of reputable institutions. The CPI reflects the views of observers from around the world, including experts living and working in the countries/territories evaluated (see *What is the CPI?* on TI's websites http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/in_detail/#myAnchor1). The results reflect twenty sources' perception of the degree of corruption in the public sector.

little on the use of false Uzbek passports in any form in connection with terrorism, trafficking or other forms of organised crime. Completely falsified passports, i.e. passports where the passport form itself is also false, are not mentioned either.

When asked, journalists connected to the regime-critical Uznews.net stated that they do not know of specific examples of using false passports, or that this has been a factor in criminal cases (Uznews.net, e-mail 16 February 2012). The journalists believe that this is an area which involves counter-terrorism and is strictly controlled by the government, and therefore it would require contacts at a very high level of government to get a false passport issued. This is consistent with information from the Uzbek German Forum (2010, p. 11) that since 2005, security services have delegated employees to OVIR to assess applications and check that exit visas are not granted for bribes.

Regardless of the actual extent of false passports, the document security should be assessed based on the potential for corruption in the passport system. OECD (2011) has pointed out the necessity of increased transparency/openness, simpler regulations and less room for discretion within the public sector in Uzbekistan, which is particularly vulnerable to corruption. The Uzbek passport system must be considered vulnerable to corruption based on these parameters.

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